

USAF Air Expeditionary Forces (AEFs)

As the permanent overseas presence of America's military forces declines, the Air Force has developed Air Expeditionary Forces (AEFs) to provide a flexible, tailored, quick-response force to fill theater needs across the spectrum of conflict.

● Introduction

- The AEF provides regional commanders-in-chief and joint task force commanders a flexible response option within 72 hours
 - Rapid, Responsive, and Reliable air power that meets specific theater needs across the spectrum of operations from humanitarian relief to force application
 - Takes advantage of the inherent strengths of air power: speed, range, and flexibility
- NOT business as usual
 - Sheds the Cold War, forward-presence mentality and infuses an expeditionary mindset into all USAF deployment and employment operations
- Light, Lean, and Lethal
 - Less lift required with lean and coordinated logistics combined with prepositioned stocks
 - "Playbooks" assist in efficient re-deployments to previously established locations
 - Demonstrates commitment through shared risk in cooperative efforts with host nations
 - Forges strong political-military bonds through cooperative training and operations
 - With CINC confidence and support, can reduce OPSTEMPO/PERSTEMPO requiring fewer forces permanently deployed in theater and a smaller intrusive US footprint

● Air Expeditionary Forces defined

- Air Expeditionary Forces (AEF) are wings, groups or squadrons attached to a deployed numbered air force (NAF) during increased OPSTEMPO
 - The wings, groups and squadrons will be designated "expeditionary" from the time they are attached to the deployed NAF, until no longer required
 - The mission of the AEF is to provide theater commanders with rapid, responsive and reliable airpower in their area of responsibility
- Air Expeditionary Wing (AEW) is a wing, or portion thereof, attached to a deployed NAF
 - The AEW is composed of the wing command element; members of the logistics, operations, support, medical groups; and squadron assets which may include approximately 20 to 40 aircraft and 1,100 people

- Past capabilities have included air-to-ground, air-to-air, and suppression of enemy air defenses, but wing could also have humanitarian or rescue capabilities.
- Air Expeditionary Group (AEG) is an independent group attached to a deployed NAF
 - The AEG is composed of a portion of the wing command element (to provide command and control) and some squadrons
 - Smaller than the AEW, the AEG is the lowest command echelon of air expeditionary forces and is normally formed from units of a single wing
- Air Expeditionary Squadron (AES) is a contingent from a squadron that is attached to the AEG
 - It is designed to configure and employ in support of crisis action requirements
 - They interact with other squadrons to conduct sustained and effective operations

● Background

- Current concept first fielded by US Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF) in 1995
 - Designed for rapid response to Gulf crises as well as to cover pre-planned gaps in regional carrier coverage, sanctions reviews, and other potential periods of heightened tensions
- Four AEF deployments conducted in Persian Gulf region to date
 - AEF I - Bahrain / Oct-Dec 95 / 576 people, 693 sorties (13% of total supporting SWA)
 - AEF II - Jordan / Apr-Jun 96 / 1150 people, 918 sorties (13% of total supporting SWA)
 - AEF III - Qatar / Jun-Aug 96 / 1086 people, 1323 sorties (13% of total supporting SWA)
 - AEF IV - Qatar / Deployed in February 1997, to AEF III site
 - Future deployments to test rapid reaction capabilities and system of prepositioning stocks
 - Forces tailored to specific CINC needs have been deployed while bombers in CONUS have been on alert

● Looking to the Future

- Continue to cultivate and strengthen relations and enhance security by ensuring short-notice access when required
- Expand the vision to provide a scaleable humanitarian relief and other missions around the world
- Institutionalize the expeditionary mindset and cultivate its joint warfighting capabilities

● Key Leaders' Quotes

"The declining size of our military demands the abandonment of the business as usual mindset. Innovative

thinking is key to reducing duplication and getting the most from our defense budget."

Dr. Sheila Widnall
Former Secretary of the Air Force

"The other aspect of Global Attack is the expeditionary nature of our force. (AEFs) will consist of a rapidly deployable force tailored to the needs of the theater commander. Depending on the situation, that force can include both lethal and non-lethal elements. This expeditionary capability will be key to rapidly providing tailored air and space capabilities to the regional commanders-in-chief in the future."

General (Ret.) Ronald Fogleman
Former Air Force Chief of Staff

"We demonstrated and refined the concept of the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) with deployments to Bahrain, Jordan and Qatar, each a huge success in demonstrating the ability of land-based air power to respond rapidly and with lethal force when and where required. Each contributed to strengthened relationships with the host nations and their air forces. Working with our partners in Air Mobility Command, we refined our AEF planning so we can respond more quickly and with a smaller deployed footprint than ever before. "

General Richard Hawley
Commander, Air Combat Command

As of: 21 Nov 97
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